

# Minuteman Missile

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior



National Historic Site  
South Dakota



*"A nuclear-missile silo is one of the quintessential Great Plains objects: to the eye, it is almost nothing, just one or two acres of ground with a concrete slab in the middle and some posts and poles sticking up behind an eight-foot-high Cyclone fence; but to the imagination, it is the end of the world."*

—Ian Frazier, *Great Plains*, 1989

**Above:** Surface structures above the underground Delta-09 launch facility for the Minuteman II missile.

NPS: ANNE TUBIOLLO

## Cold War 101

The history of the Cold War is still being written. For the millions of people who lived through that era, memories and images remain: duck-and-cover drills, the Cuban Missile Crisis, President Richard Nixon's 1972 trip to China, the 1980 U.S. Olympic hockey team's upset victory, and the fall of the Berlin Wall—an event widely viewed as the beginning of the end of the Cold War.

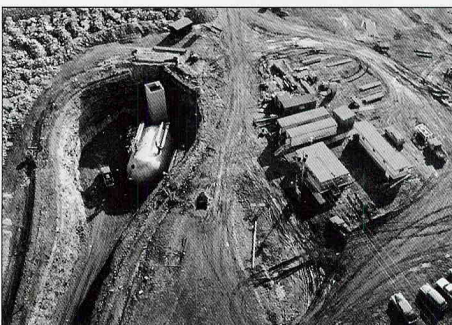
Unlike a conventional war, there are no starting or ending dates, direct military encounters, or casualty counts. Instead, the Cold War is commonly understood as an ideological, economic, and political struggle between the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (U.S.S.R.). A key part of the U.S. defense

strategy during the Cold War was deterrence, wherein U.S. nuclear forces were (and still are) maintained at a constant state of readiness.

Developed in the 1950s, the Minuteman I missile was an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM), part of the triad of air-, land-, and sea-based nuclear weapons. Due to innovative solid-fuel technology, the Minuteman I and the later Minuteman II could be deployed from unstaffed underground silos, launched by crews stationed miles away, travel over the North Pole, and arrive at a target in 30 minutes. The Minuteman II's 1.2 megaton warhead was the explosive equivalent of more than one million tons of dynamite.

Although there are no longer any active ICBM silos in South Dakota, 500 nuclear missiles are still deployed in the upper Great Plains. While the threats of the Cold War era have subsided, the nation's defense systems remain on alert.

Minuteman Missile National Historic Site was established by Congress in 1999 to preserve two 1960s missile sites: Delta-09, a missile silo, and Delta-01, a launch control facility. The park invites you to explore the history and significance of the arms race and ICBM development. Here you can learn about the role of the Minuteman II system and visit sites that were seldom seen by civilians during their use but that nevertheless loomed large on the political landscape.



The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers built South Dakota's 15 underground Minuteman missile launch control centers in the early 1960s.

COURTESY: NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE U.S. AIR FORCE



President John F. Kennedy (center) tours a Strategic Air Command facility in California, 1962. Kennedy was a strong proponent of the Minuteman II missile defense system.

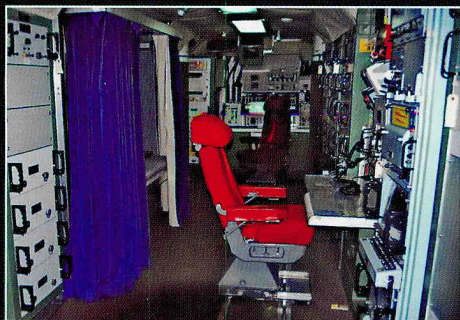
NATIONAL ARCHIVES



In 1987 President Ronald Reagan challenged Russian President Mikhail Gorbachev to tear down the Berlin Wall and bring an end to the Cold War.

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**Left: Underground launch control center at Delta-01.**

COURTESY: MEAD & HUNT, INC.

**Right: Minuteman II missile (unarmed) in the silo at Delta-09.**

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**A Delta Flight Peace-keeper vehicle used by security personnel to patrol surface facilities.**

NPS



## Why This Site?

Under the terms of the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) signed in 1991 by U.S. President George Bush and Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev, the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. began to reduce their stockpiles of nuclear arms. As deactivation of Minuteman II missile sites progressed, employees of the U.S. Air Force (USAF) and the National Park Service worked toward preservation of a representative site to illustrate the history and significance of the Cold War, the arms race, and the dedication of USAF personnel.

After years of effort Minuteman Missile National Historic Site was established in 1999. The site is the first to be dedicated exclusively to the events of the Cold War.

Out of 450 Minuteman II missile sites nationwide, Delta-01 Launch Control Facility and Delta-09 Launch Facility were selected for preservation because:

- They were the most typical and least altered from the original 1961 Minuteman missile configuration.
- They symbolize the dedication and preparedness exhibited by USAF personnel stationed in remote locations throughout the upper Great Plains.
- They are near a major traffic corridor (I-90), which allows for easy access by the visiting public.



**President George Bush (second from left) and Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev (second from right) sign the START treaty, July 31, 1991.**

COURTESY: GEORGE BUSH PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARY

## Planning Your Visit

New to the National Park System, Minuteman Missile National Historic Site is still being developed for visitor use. Tours are conducted as staffing permits. For up-to-date information on the history and planning of the park, tours, and volunteer opportunities, contact the park staff (information at right).

You can visit the Project Office during regular business hours. The office is located at I-90, exit 131.

The South Dakota Air and Space Museum at Ellsworth Air Force Base has many displays and artifacts from the Cold War era, including aircraft, missiles, a trans-

porter-erector vehicle, and a missile procedures trainer. It also maintains the former missile wing's training launch facility, where visitors can tour an underground missile silo. Contact the Air and Space Museum at 605-385-5188.

Minuteman Missile National Historic Site is one of more than 380 parks in the National Park System. The National Park Service cares for these special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage. To learn more about national parks and National Park Service programs in America's communities, visit [www.nps.gov](http://www.nps.gov).

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The park is about 70 miles east of Rapid City, S. Dak. off I-90. Take exit 131 to the Project Office.

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